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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN MEDIA COVERAGE JULY 2006

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Turkmenistan state media provided relatively positive coverage of and adequate support for mission events in July. Turkmenistan state television was active and positive in its coverage of ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson's statement on U.S. Independence Day, her farewell meeting with President Niyazov and performances by the HaviKoro cultural group (HaviKoro's visit to be reported septel). Meanwhile, Turkmenistan's state print media provided abbreviated coverage of the ambassador's meeting with the president and failed to reprint post-provided notices advertising two of HaviKoro's three public performances. Turkmenistan's two state television outlets provided divergent coverage of the high-profile HaviKoro program, with one outlet emphasizing host government involvement and the other focusing on the program itself.

State Media Provides Full Coverage of Ambassador's July 4 Statement

¶2. (U) In response to a request by local television to tape the ambassador's annual U.S. Independence Day address, the ambassador delivered a one-page statement in English on July 2. On July 4, local dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 32,241) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 28,161) printed a long article beside the ambassador's photo and statement on the occasion of U.S. Independence Day. The ambassador noted that she was finishing her service in Turkmenistan and emphasized the main U.S. policy goals in Turkmenistan:

-- support for democratic reforms and human rights - including progress in the health sector,

-- economic development and

-- security cooperation.

Coverage included the ambassador's detailed outline of mission achievements since the beginning of her tenure in 2003, including statistics on training conducted, exchange program participation and mention of post-supported initiatives such as the construction of two border crossing stations on Turkmenistan's borders. Coverage included the following statement: "I hope to be able to return to Turkmenistan someday to witness the country's progress. I hope to return to a Turkmenistan with a world class educational system that meets international standards. I hope to return to a democratic Turkmenistan where every citizen has the right to express his opinion, and where a vibrant civil society is a partner with the government in charting the course to development." (Note: The host government called post - presumably prior to submitting the

statement for the president's approval - with a number of questions and requests about the statement, leading post to believe that state media would not reprint the full statement.) Despite host government hesitations, state TV's "Watan" News program broadcast the ambassador's statement in full on July 4 and the weekly "Mugallymlar Gazeti" (Turkmen, circ. 76,291) reprinted the statement on its front page on July 5.

Patchy Coverage of 2006 U.S. Culture Week

¶3. (U) On July 4, "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and "Turkmenistan" both carried an article on mission guests HaviKoro that included a summary of their July 3 public performance and an interview with one of the group members. The article included the ambassador's opening remarks where she emphasized that such events reinforce friendly bilateral relations and help encourage cultural and intellectual curiosity. The article stated that the American performers wowed the viewers with their modern music and distinct rhythms. On July 5, "Mugallymlar Gazeti" reprinted the same article on its front page. "Watan" television news and "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" provided accurate and timely information on the upcoming two HaviKoro performances during the week of July 3-7 by broadcasting and reprinting the advertisements supplied by post. However, "Turkmenistan" neglected to place these advertisements. (Note: Post provided Russian-language advertisements to "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and Turkmen versions to "Turkmenistan.")

¶4. (U) "Watan" aired shots of HaviKoro's performances in Ashgabat and Turkmenbashy (Note: The broadcast used the opportunity to speak on behalf of the group to praise Ashgabat's Magtymguly National Musical Drama Theatre and Turkmenbashy's Rukhyet Palace). The State-run TV-4 Channel coverage of the Ashgabat concert - a joint performance with local break dance group Dance Power, showcased the ambassador's opening remarks and an interview in which she

ASHGABAT 00000883 002 OF 002

emphasized that the HaviKoro program was part of a larger effort to build bilateral friendship and enrich Turkmenistanis' cultural knowledge. Interviewees at the show expressed their great satisfaction with the show and noted the culture exchange facilitated successful relations between people. Each member of HaviKoro also gave an interview in which he talked about the group's origins and stressed the importance of U.S. Embassies' and American Voices' support to organizing such tours worldwide. (Note: HaviKoro is a part of performing arts consortium American Voices.) The group members emphasized their goal to bring a positive message to youth through their performances and to promote the exchange of cultural heritage throughout the world. The TV-4 coverage concluded with shots of the performance. (Note: TV-4, a satellite channel, broadcasts its footage in seven languages successively.)

Ambassador's Farewell Meeting with President Niyazov

¶5. (U) On July 4, "Watan" provided misleadingly positive but otherwise thorough coverage of the ambassador's farewell call on the president. Coverage began with Niyazov's congratulations on the anniversary of the United States' independence and the ambassador's thanks for support she received during her tenure, after which the "Watan" newscaster described their discussion as positive and focusing on the satisfactory bilateral partnership in the fields of education, healthcare, and security. The narrative mentioned Turkmenistan's success in implementing democratic reforms and dwelled on the upcoming election of local councils. The newscaster also said that the ambassador stressed the importance of democratic change and the significance of elections based on genuine democracy, noting that such a process was key to creating the conditions for further democratic reform. The ambassador's full lobby statement followed, where she noted that the president had promised a democratic and transparent elections process. (Note: The ambassador delivered her floor statement in Russian). "We also talked about education and the need for continuous development of the educational system. We, the USA, are ready to help in this important job because as you know the education is a key to prosperity of every nation."

¶6. (U) "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" and "Turkmenistan", and weeklies "Watan" (Turkmen, circ. 25419), "Turkmen Gundogary" (Turkmen, circ. 42728) and "Ashgabat" (Turkmen, circ. 15091) reprinted shortened coverage of the "Watan" broadcast, omitting any mention of democracy and education that could be construed as critical of the president's policies.

Comment

¶7. (U) State print and broadcast media surprised post by providing full coverage of the ambassador's statement for U.S. Independence Day, after post received multiple inquiries from Turkmenistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and state media about the content of the statement. The ministry requested further detail about statistics in the statement regarding contributions of security equipment mission had donated to the host country. Post declined to modify a sentence in the statement that the MFA and state media claimed was derogatory - "I hope to be able to return to Turkmenistan someday to witness the country's progress." However, post did comply with a request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that post omit a phrase from the statement indicating where the two mission-supported border posts are being constructed - Iran and Afghanistan.

¶8. (U) As expected, coverage of the ambassador's farewell meeting with the president Niyazov received incomplete coverage in print media though television coverage was full if misleading.

End Comment.

¶8. (SBU) Dushanbe Minimize considered